How News Organizations Can Increase Their Twitter Clout & Fight Climate Change

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Background

• Science communicators and journalists struggle to communicate the risks of climate change
• More people are getting their news from social media than ever before, especially Twitter
• News organizations can use elements of Twitter more effectively to promote environmental news

Research Question

Does the format of tweets from news organizations about scientific and environmental topics impact audience engagement?

Internship

• Served as a general communications intern with the Environmental Protection Agency, Region 10
• Created two videos highlighting the EPA's work
• Translated scientific material for a broad audience

Methods

• Conducted expert elicitation interviews with audience engagement experts at The New York Times, High Country News, and Crosscut
• Observed formatting and decision-making patterns
• Used Twitonomy to analyze 10 environmental news organizations’ Twitter accounts
• Found the top 10 most retweeted and favorited tweets from that organization’s last 3200 tweets
• Analyzed top 10 tweets for successful formatting choices including links, mentions, hashtags, videos, photos, quotes, statistics, emojis, jargon, threads, gifs, emojis, and polls

Results: Ways to Increase Engagement

1. Use statistics and quotes
   - Used in 54% of top tweets
   - Quotes often drew readers in, according to audience engagement experts

2. Use hashtags and @ mentions
   - Used in 34% of top tweets
   - Hashtags redirect readers to other relevant information on the topic
   - @ mentions increase the likelihood someone quoted in the article will share with their community, according to engagement experts

3. Include links, photos, or videos in tweets
   - Used in 100% of top tweets
   - This directs readers to the bigger story or the bigger picture

4. Post multiple times with different captions
   - Tailors tweets to commuting hours, times for longer reads, etc.
   - 8% of top tweets were a repeat of another top tweet, audience engagement experts universally agree that this increases engagement

Implications

• No one-size-fits-all approach
• Successful accounts can have a range of styles and formats
• Even with little engagement, there is inherent value in sharing environmental news stories
• To better communicate environmental issues, news organizations should consistently evaluate their own Twitter presence

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